Chapter 13 **Pluralism in Schools:**

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Learning and schooling are critical for every individual in any society. The future of our diverse society will depend on how schools educate coming generations, and pluralism must be a significant factor in that education. Many people refer to *diversity* and *pluralism* as if the two terms were synonymous, but diversity simply describes the existence of many different groups of people within a society, whereas pluralism describes a society in which diversity is accepted and supported. In a pluralistic society, diverse groups function together effectively, with mutual respect. In a society that is diverse but not pluralistic, schools tend to teach principally about the dominant group—its influence on the evolution of society, and its literature, art, and music. In a diverse society committed to pluralism, schools teach about all groups within the society.

Misunderstanding of terms occurs when we fail to clarify meanings and intentions. No study of human differences is complete without special terms, and precise communication exists only when everyone is clear about their meaning. So we must start with an appropriate definition of multicultural education and understand its importance for our diverse society.

Multicultural education is based on a commitment to pluralism; its guiding purpose is to prepare students to be active participants in a diverse, democratic society. There is confusion and considerable debate about multicultural education, even among educators who advocate for it. Some teachers regard multicultural education simply as the process of integrating issues and information about race and ethnicity into school curricula, but that describes what Banks (2006) defines as multiethnic education. Other

educators regard multicultural education as a curriculum for teaching about cultures around the world, but that is usually called global (or international) education (Aintablian, 2014; Gayle-Evans & Michael, 2006). Some advocates say multicultural education includes recognition of women, gay men and lesbians, people with disabilities, and other minority groups; opponents to this idea argue that such groups do not constitute distinct cultures and therefore should not be included. This confusion raises many questions that must be answered before we can understand what multicultural education is and recognize schools that are engaged in an authentic form of this educational approach.

In addition to conflicting opinions about the definition of the term *multicultural education* and who should be included, there are numerous perceptions about who benefits from it. Gayle-Evans and Michael (2006) review several studies reporting that many teachers were uncomfortable incorporating multicultural issues into their content because they felt that the topics were "too sensitive"; educators also said they did not feel that their teacher education programs adequately prepared them to implement multicultural education practices. Kumashiro (2010) has argued that much of the reluctance to implement multicultural education stems from the social justice issues that are addressed. Multicultural education challenges what students think they know—assumptions that seem "natural" or just "common sense." Hines (2007) has argued that students in multicultural education classes must rethink their assumptions by asking questions such as "What are the alternatives?" and "Who benefits from this (policy/practice/outcome)?" Kumashiro (2010) also asserts that concepts learned in multicultural education often require that students unlearn some of their assumptions first, a process that may make them uncomfortable—so uncomfortable that they begin to resist the theories and research presented to them. Teachers may avoid the issue by simply including contributions of a few people of color in the curriculum, but this does not adequately provide an education that can be called *multicultural*.

What does it mean for education to be called *multicultural*?

As early as 1974, Hilliard wrote that multicultural refers to a society "made up of a number of cultural groups based upon race, ethnicity, religion, language, nationality, income, etc." (Hillard, 1974, p. 41). Hilliard's comment is assumed to mean that the term *multicultural* includes other subordinate groups that he did not specifically identify, such as women, gay men and lesbians, and people with disabilities.

As for the term *education*, we must distinguish between *education* and *training*. Some dictionaries suggest that education and training are synonyms, but people take classes to train them in a particular skill. An individual can be trained to drive or cook, or be trained to train a dog. Education is a broader concept. Partridge (1983) explained that *educate* derives from the Latin word *ducere*, which means "to lead"; *educere* means "to lead out or bring forth" (p. 169); *education* means "to bring forth the potential of an individual." In addition to developing cognitive skill and affective sensitivity, education entails developing an understanding of previous achievements in subjects such as history, literature, and science as a basis for making individual and societal choices in the future. Carse (1986) distinguished education from training:

Education discovers an increasing richness in the past because it sees what is unfinished there. Training regards the past as finished and the future to be finished. Education leads toward a continuing self-discovery; training leads toward a final self-definition. (p. 23)

Multicultural education integrates information about past issues with achievements of diverse groups to describe how they have influenced our society. Children and youth from all groups are thereby provided with a sense of belonging to our society by understanding how their group has helped to shape what our society is and by appreciating the potential they have for influencing what it will become.

What is an appropriate definition for multicultural education?

Multicultural education is a journey that leads students to self-discovery and to a sense of personal efficacy. Nieto (2012) provides a comprehensive definition and description of multicultural education that includes the components to be addressed in this chapter:

Multicultural education is a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy . . . multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice. (p. 42)

Nieto's definition and description of multicultural education emphasizes that it is not a "business-as-usual" approach to schooling. It requires changes in teaching methods and perspectives on learning because of critical philosophical differences between traditional education and multicultural education (see Figure 13.1).

Traditional Assumptions in American Education

The development of American schools has been based on a conservative philosophy that was eventually labeled *essentialism*, and essentialist assumptions are still in place. The term stems from the belief that an essential body of knowledge and essential human values that have stood the test of time can be identified and transmitted to students. Essentialists describe the purpose of schools as the transmission of the most significant accumulated knowledge and values from previous generations to the coming generation.

What body of knowledge have essentialists identified?

Essentialist scholars maintain that knowledge from four disciplines is essential: social studies, science, mathematics, and English language and literature; therefore, these four subjects are emphasized in elementary, middle, and high school. Graduation requirements for high school students usually include a minimum of two years of course work, often three or even four, in social studies, science, mathematics, and English. To essentialists, subjects such as art, music, and physical education are accepted principally to make school more enjoyable, but they are regarded as additional rather than essential. When administrators consider budget reductions, programs in art, music, and physical education are scrutinized and are most likely to be reduced or eliminated. Similar assumptions continue into college, where general education programs often require students to choose a selection of courses in social studies, science, math, and English literature and composition.

What essential human values do schools teach?

As indicated in Chapter 1, Myrdal (1944) identified core American values that are embraced by most citizens and taught in most schools. In addition, Americans presume that there are certain values that represent the American middle class: promptness, honesty, hard work, competitiveness, and efficiency. Teachers implement traditional approaches to teaching values (see Chapter 1) to convince children and youth that the core values are worthwhile and should be adopted. Students may say they believe in these

values because it’s expected of them, even though their behavior often does not suggest that they have a genuine commitment to them.

How do essentialists define or describe learning?

Essentialists define learning as the acquisition of essential knowledge and values. Metaphors used by essentialists to describe learning portray knowledge as water and students as empty vessels to be filled or as sponges ready to absorb. To assess learning, essentialists favor objective tests with questions about factual information to ascertain whether students absorbed the information. If they did not, teachers may review the information and test students again. In extreme cases, students may repeat a grade to have a second chance to learn material in the hope that the teacher, perhaps a different teacher, will be more successful in helping them acquire the information. Maturity and readiness are considered secondary in this process.

What is the role of the essentialist teacher in helping students learn?

An essentialist teacher is supposed to be a skillful transmitter of information and an advocate for American values. Teachers are expected to be role models of our society’s values—both inside and outside the classroom. As transmitters of information, teachers are expected to use technology to make information interesting and thereby promote acquisition of knowledge. Although teachers may select from a variety of pedagogical techniques, the goal is to motivate students to remember information provided in textbooks, lectures, and media.

Why are students not learning in essentialist schools?

The first issue has to do with what has been considered essential. During the past several decades, research in various fields, especially the sciences, has generated what scholars have called a *knowledge explosion*. Given so much new knowledge, how is one to determine which facts are most important? Whereas women and writers of color were minimally represented in previous literature anthologies, advocates are increasingly demanding that their voices be acknowledged. Curriculum reformers suggest that students regard traditional essentialist curriculum as inaccurate, irrelevant, and not at all motivational.

Another problem is that we know students learn at different rates. If teachers transmit information at a certain prescribed rate, some students learn all of

it, some learn most of it, and some retain very little of it; yet teachers often must proceed as if all students learned equally. The solution essentialists have developed to address incomplete learning is to group students according to ability, which is known as *tracking*. Studies of tracking have found that excellent students learn just as well in heterogeneous groups as in homogeneous groups where they are grouped by ability, but that the achievement of moderate and slow learners improves significantly when they are in mixed groups rather than when they are grouped according to academic ability (Hattie, 2009; Oakes, 2005; Oakes et al., 2000). Despite these consistent research conclusions, essentialist schools tend to continue to group students according to ability (Toppo, 2013).

Perhaps the most significant obstacle to learning in essentialist schools is the problem of retention and transfer. Retention refers to student recall of knowledge; transfer is the ability of students to apply that knowledge both inside and outside the classroom. Students have long complained about cramming before taking exams that require them to memorize material. Studies have consistently found that students tend to forget 50–80 percent of the new information they supposedly learned (Hoffman, 2014). Many reform-oriented educators have promoted the concept of constructivism, the belief that students do not passively acquire knowledge but actively construct their knowledge, and that students forget what they have learned when the teaching occurs in isolation from any meaningful context. Constructivists challenge teachers not to lecture use other methods to dispense knowledge but to provide a context that allows students to make their own mental constructions based on information and ideas they encounter (Dornoo, 2015). Educational research documents that K–12 teachers tend to teach in a style that is consistent with traditional educational strategies. Yet the constructivists point to studies where reform-oriented instructional strategies were implemented with the result that students earned higher test scores, even on high-stakes tests (Doorno, 2015).

Charter schools represent another response to the problem of how to improve student learning.

Charter schools represent another response to the problem of how to improve student learning. In 2013, the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University conducted a study of charter schools analyzing data from 1.7 million students attending over 5000 charter schools that were supposed to engage in innovative educational practices

that would foster more effective ways of teaching diverse students. Yet the CREDO (2013) study found no significant difference in the reading scores for 56 percent of charter school students compared to public school students, and the reading performance of 19 percent of students in charter schools was significantly worse than public school students. Further, a 2017 Associated Press study reported that charter schools represent some of the most racially segregated schools in our nation. The enrollments of more than 1000 charter schools were 99 percent students of color; only 4 percent of public schools have similar minority enrollments compared to 17 percent of charter schools. Research has consistently found that students of color attending racially segregated schools demonstrate significantly lower levels of academic achievement. As one civil rights advocate stated: “There is no amount of money you can put into a segregated school that is going to make it equal” (Moreno, Fenn, & Melia, 2017, A2). Public schools are also obligated to meet the needs of special education students, requiring increased resources, but charter schools, which do not tend to enroll students with disabilities are taking these resources away. One study found that public schools were underfunded by about $2 billion. As one University of Illinois education professor stated: “The poorest kids and the kids with the most costly special needs still go to public schools” (Gurley, 2016, p. 55). As an alternative to the failed charter school approach, many educators advocate multicultural education, which requires a transformation of the assumptions essentialist schools have made about schools, teaching, and learning.

Assumptions of Multicultural Education

To resolve problems related to student learning, as parents or educators, we must change our assumptions about curriculum content, learning, teaching, and the purpose of schools. As described by Banks (2014), Nieto (2012), Gollnick and Chinn (2013), and others, multicultural education challenges those assumptions.

What assumptions do multicultural educators make about curriculum?

Nieto’s widely accepted definition of multicultural education includes an affirmation of diversity that must permeate the curriculum to provide honest representations of diversity in American society. According to reviews of their content, textbooks continue to be dominated by the art, music, history, literature, perspectives, and images of White Americans (Stanton, 2015; Sleeter, 2011). Portrayals of Black people are still largely associated with slavery, Latinos and Asian Americans are usually in the background with no

attention given to their role in history or contemporary society, and American Indians are primarily historical figures encountered as White people move westward to “settle” America. If racism is described, it tends to be in the context of a historical account (e.g., slavery) with no connection to or mention of contemporary racism; in addition, usually a few individuals are portrayed as perpetrators of racism rather than racism being presented as a system of oppression. As Stanton (2015) concluded, “Textbook authors frequently privilege Eurocentric narratives and perspectives” (pp. 183–184).

According to Sleeter (2011), studies of students of color in high school report that not only are they aware of the bias in their classes, but they are also able to describe it in detail. This bias is identified as a contributing factor for those who admit to a growing lack of interest in school. A study of Black middle school students in a talented and gifted program found that all of these students wanted to learn more about Black people in their school curricula and believed that such curricular content would make their classes more interesting. Students of color attending college have the same concern. A survey of over 500 university students reported that most of them, especially students of color, identified the inclusion of perspectives from people of color in course curricula as the most significant factor in their judgment of a university’s commitment to diversity.

To present a realistic understanding of our multicultural society and the influence of diverse groups on our society, advocates support a multicultural curriculum for all students. Based on her review of studies assessing academic and social outcomes for students introduced to racial and ethnic issues, Sleeter (2011) reported that all students benefited from their exposure to this curricula. A multicultural curriculum examines the influences of diverse groups on historical events, literary developments, musical styles, artistic expression, athletic achievements, and other facets of American society—but the goal is not simply to memorize facts. Appleton (1983) described multicultural curriculum as “a conceptual approach that provides a framework for understanding the experience and perspectives of all the groups” (p. 211). The need for a conceptual approach is another assumption about curriculum by multicultural educators.

Why is it necessary to take a conceptual approach to curriculum?

Because of the knowledge explosion, it is impractical to emphasize memorization. It is not possible for us to remember all available information in every subject; we also know that much information soon will be obsolete or supplanted by new knowledge. In a multicultural curriculum,

understanding broad concepts is preferable to memorizing facts. An early advocate for multicultural education, Gay (1977) described multicultural curriculum designs based on a thematic approach and a conceptual framework. In the thematic approach, students employ information from different disciplines to explore universal themes such as the search for identity, communication and conflict resolution, human interdependence, economics and exploitation, or the struggle for a just society (see also Gay, 2010).

Curriculum based on a conceptual framework requires an interdisciplinary approach. Beginning with a concept such as power, alienation, or socialization, students collect data from various sources addressing the concept, leading them to the identification and exploration of related concepts. Dover (2013) described a *social justice* conceptual framework that incorporated aspects from multicultural education in ways that challenged students to confront injustice based on their understanding of oppression theory (multiple forms of oppression), and social identity. Although this approach was initially implemented in higher education, the idea of "teaching for social justice" is being implemented by teachers in K–12 schools in conjunction with addressing academic standards being promoted by state and federal governments.

Because multicultural curriculum is based on concepts rather than on specific content, students are involved in a dynamic search for knowledge that is never finished, whereas the monocultural curriculum traditionally presented in schools is a finished product. As Nieto (2008) wrote,

When reality is presented in schools as static, finished, and flat, the underlying tensions, controversies, passions and problems faced by people throughout history and today disappear. (p. 55)

Identifying concepts for students to analyze and discuss to clarify their understanding is the foundation of multicultural curriculum; to be effective, it is critical that the curriculum not be sabotaged by the hidden curriculum in school.

What is the hidden curriculum?

Pai and Adler (1997) define hidden curriculum as the indirect means by which schools teach students "the norms and values of their society" (p. 148). They describe the hidden curriculum as subtle messages learned from pictures displayed on bulletin boards or from school policies such as tracking. Intentional or unintentional messages can promote values but often vary,

such as high income children being taught leadership and problem solving skills and low-income children being taught to respect authority and being rewarded for compliance. The messages may not seem so hidden when you look at curricular content. Teaching that Columbus discovered America tells children that Native Americans were irrelevant and can be ignored. Teaching that Old World art refers only to ancient Greek and Roman cultures denies the artistic heritage of many—especially non-Western—countries. Educators implementing multicultural curricula must be especially sensitive to subtle messages provided by the hidden curriculum.

Why have schools implemented multicultural curriculum?

Many schools across the United States, especially in urban areas, have developed their own multicultural materials to supplement inadequate textbooks. Banks (2008) categorized the efforts into four approaches: the contributions approach, the additive approach, the transformation approach, and the social action approach. The first two approaches address multicultural education minimally by including heroes, holidays, and other cultural information (*contributions*), and then adding some multicultural concepts and perspectives to the curriculum (*additive*), but leaving its basic structure unchanged. The last two approaches come much closer to satisfying Nieto's definition of multicultural education.

"The wise person can see a question from all sides without bias. The foolish person is biased and can see a question only from one side."

—CONFUCIUS (551–479 BCE)

A *transformation* approach to multicultural curriculum design emphasizes concepts and themes. Students are presented with multiple perspectives on issues, and the goal is not to identify a "right perspective" but to understand how each perspective contributes to a richer understanding of issues. Critical thinking skills are emphasized as students develop their own insights and conclusions and logically justify them.

A *social action* approach to multicultural curriculum design encourages students to take action based on their ideas and conclusions. Students individually or collectively pursue projects at school and in their community to address problems they identify and study. The goal of a social action approach is to empower students and to demonstrate that learning is not a game of *Trivial Pursuit*. Knowledge can lead to social action and create positive change. By encouraging critical thinking and active learning,

multicultural educators combine theory and practice about conditions necessary to promote effective learning.

How do multicultural educators describe learning?

Advocates for multicultural education rely on cognitive development theory to describe how people learn. In essence, learning is a process of meaning making. Learners organize ideas, information, and experiences they encounter in order to make sense of them. They may categorize, find relationships, and simplify complex issues to achieve understanding. According to Sleeter and Grant (2003), “Learning is a process of constructing knowledge through the interaction of mind and experience” (p. 196). Piaget (1974) observed that children learn by interacting physically and intellectually with their environment. If students are provided information through lecture, they may attempt to extract relevant meaning from it, but if they perceive no relevance in the information, they are not likely to make the effort.

Learning results from the active interaction of individuals with information. Learning also requires meaningfulness. Information regarded as meaningless will not be learned. Active learning promotes the development of competence and confidence, the basis for Dewey’s insistence that children “learn by doing.” Feeling competent and gaining self-confidence leads to a sense of power. As Hilliard (1974) wrote, “Learning is related to a sense of power over some of the forces which impinge upon our lives” (p. 47). If students feel powerless, they have little motivation to learn; when students are active, they develop skills and demonstrate abilities that reinforce self-confidence and give a sense of personal competence, and they acquire an enthusiasm for learning.

With regard to skill development, learning must not be limited to basic academic skills—reading, writing, computing—but must include a multitude of skills related to critical thinking, creativity, decision-making, problem solving, information accessing, interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, conflict resolution, visual literacy, and self-analysis. Gay (1977) said education that “does not include the development of skills that will increase and enhance students’ capabilities to live and function in a culturally pluralistic setting is incomplete” (p. 98). Although students may develop skills, an obstacle they face to facilitating skill development is that there are multiple ways of learning; therefore, a single teaching strategy may be inadequate. Teachers committed to multicultural education believe that

all children can learn—as long as learning activities can be designed to accommodate each child.

Why is self-confidence necessary for learning?

Scholars have known for some time now that if students think they cannot learn something, they aren't likely to learn it. Combs (1979) claimed, "People behave in terms of what they believe about themselves. Whether we feel adequate or inadequate greatly affects how we approach a task" (p. 108). Al-Hebaish (2012) also found a significant correlation between self-confidence and academic achievement. Briggs (2014) has written that: "Decades of research support the notion that believing in your ability to do something enhances your ability to do it" (n/a). Research studies have also confirmed that attitudes of teachers can positively or negatively affect student self-confidence. Although teachers should not have unrealistic expectations, they should express high expectations for students to facilitate learning.

What must teachers do to implement a multicultural education approach?

Sleeter and Grant (2003) identified five distinct approaches to multicultural education, two of which also satisfy the criteria included in Nieto's description: multicultural education and education that is multicultural *and* social reconstructionist (see Table 13.1). For purposes of clarity, the latter is referred to here as the *social reconstructionist approach*.

Table 13.1 Approaches to Multicultural Education

GOALS: To help low-achieving students succeed within traditional education by building bridges between them and the curriculum, and providing special assistance.
CURRICULUM: Based on the traditional curriculum but incorporates students' experiences (especially those who are culturally different). Uses classroom materials that include meaningful contexts for the students.
INSTRUCTION: Implements English as a Second Language or transitional bilingual education for language minority students and culturally relevant teaching for culturally different students; provides remedial classes including special education placement for temporary but intensive remediation; displays images relevant to students on wall posters and bulletin boards.

Human Relations
GOALS: To maintain traditional educational assumptions but with an emphasis on reducing prejudice, developing positive student self-concepts,

and promoting acceptance of individual diversity.
CURRICULUM: Based on the traditional curriculum but including content on prejudice and stereotypes, similarities and differences among groups and individuals, and societal contributions from members of diverse groups in society, especially those groups represented by the students in the school.
INSTRUCTION: Uses strategies that build student-student relationships such as conflict mediation, role playing, simulations that address interpersonal relationships, and cooperative learning; displays student work on walls and bulletin boards.

Single Group Studies
GOALS: To provide knowledge about a particular group (Women's Studies, Chicano Studies, etc.) including an examination of structural inequalities affecting members of this group and encouraging students to work for social change.
CURRICULUM: Provides information (for a unit or course) about cultural characteristics and historical experiences of a group with emphasis on perspectives of group members and how this group has been and still is oppressed.
INSTRUCTION: Responds to learning style differences of the group with accommodations for individual learning styles; incorporates media, music, performances, and guest speakers to address aspects of the culture or issues related to the group; wall displays and bulletin boards emphasize societal contributions from individual members of the group.

Multicultural Education
GOALS: To promote cultural pluralism by emphasizing respect for human differences, including individual lifestyles, equal opportunity for all in school and society, and the need for power equity among diverse groups in society.
CURRICULUM: Provides content on diverse groups and their contributions to society with emphasis on perspectives from members of each group; incorporates student experiences to enhance curriculum relevance, and emphasizes the need to be aware of and understand alternative perspectives on issues; addresses "hidden curriculum" by including diversity in special events, holidays, school menus, etc.
INSTRUCTION: Responds to student learning styles and skill levels with emphasis on an analysis of curriculum content and critical thinking activities; promotes respect for and use of other languages and dialects while learning standard English; displays wall posters and bulletin boards that reflect human diversity represented by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion,

and other diverse groups, as well as issues reflecting individual student interests.

Education That Is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist
GOALS: To promote cultural pluralism and structural equality for diverse groups in our society, to prepare students to be active participants in our democratic society by understanding structural inequalities and promoting equal opportunity.
CURRICULUM: Provides content on current social issues of oppression and structural inequalities for diverse groups using perspectives of members of those groups and perspectives of students and community members; emphasizes historic and contemporary life experiences for self-reflection, analyzing oppression, and understanding alternative perspectives; addresses "hidden curriculum" by including diversity in special events, holidays, school menus, etc.
INSTRUCTION: Responds to student learning styles and skill levels with emphasis on active student involvement in democratic decision making in the school; engages students in critical thinking and in problem solving to promote the development of social action skills that empower students; employs cooperative learning and group projects, especially those involving the community; avoids testing and tracking procedures that represent narrow views of student learning that label some students as failures; displays wall posters and bulletin boards that reflect cultural diversity, social action themes, and student interests.

Principles underlying a multicultural education approach are reflected in an early and influential statement provided by the Commission on Multicultural Education entitled "No One Model American" (Hunter, 1974):

Multicultural education values cultural pluralism . . . (and) rejects the view that schools should seek to melt away cultural differences or the view that schools should merely tolerate cultural pluralism. Instead, multicultural education affirms that schools should be oriented toward the cultural enrichment of all children and youth through programs rooted to the preservation and extension of cultural diversity as a fact of life in American society. (p. 21)

A *multicultural education approach* insists that a diverse society can achieve unity through diversity; it need not eliminate cultural differences. Although some advocates of this approach focus on racial and ethnic groups, most promote a broader view of diversity that provides information on women, LGBTQ people, low-income families, and people with disabilities.

Multicultural education advocates support integration, inclusion, and “de-tracking” to create heterogeneous classrooms emphasizing skill development to gain knowledge and a better understanding of diverse groups in America. Further, a multicultural education approach calls for curricular reform to correct omissions and distortions in textbooks concerning diverse groups, and provides multiple perspectives on important historical or contemporary events. Advocates have criticized visual images in textbooks for not representing diversity in American society adequately and for continuing to depict certain groups in stereotypical ways. They urge teachers to use bulletin boards and media to provide accurate representations of diverse groups.

Advocates for the multicultural education approach challenge teachers to be sensitive to language that is derogatory toward any group and to model the use of inclusive language. They posit that teachers must explore and understand diverse ways of learning to be able to design or modify lessons to accommodate individual differences. In addition to having high expectations for all students, multicultural teachers encourage cooperation between students in the classroom through group activities. Teachers should not treat all students the same; rather, they should address students equitably with responses based on their diverse needs.

A *social reconstructionist approach* shares many principles and practices with a multicultural education approach. Four major differences include: (1) attention to structural inequalities in America; (2) emphasis on democratic decision-making in the classroom; (3) development of social action skills to empower students; and (4) use of an activist curriculum with student projects addressing problems in schools and communities.

Social reconstructionism has roots in the Progressive Education movement and in Dewey’s 1920 book *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, which inspired the term. In the early 1930s, Counts and Rugg, leaders of a group called “Frontier Thinkers,” were concerned about inequities in American society and urged that schools play a more active role in creating a more equitable society (Kneller, 1971). In his 1956 book, *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education*, Brameld became an influential advocate for reconstructionism, suggesting that schools create a new social order by fostering democratic principles and demanding more citizen control over major institutions and resources.

A social reconstructionist approach to multicultural education focuses less on simply teaching about cultural diversity and more on the struggles of diverse

groups against oppression. The curriculum includes examples of both a group's successful resistance to oppression and actions by allies from the dominant group against injustice. This approach emphasizes specific classroom practices to develop student decision-making skills and to encourage social action projects.

What specific instructional strategies are recommended for teachers?

Sleeter (1996) insisted that implementing multicultural education effectively requires that teaching not be regarded as merely experimenting with a variety of classroom strategies; instead she described the importance of "listening to oppressed people, including scholars, with the aim of learning to hear and understand what is being said" (p. 134). By listening to students and their parents, teachers will develop an appreciation for and an understanding of their students, and will genuinely project high regard and high expectations for all students. Nieto (2012) argued that before one can become a multicultural teacher, they must first become a "multicultural person." She goes on to say that becoming a multicultural person means knowing about human differences and desiring to learn more; examining personal attitudes for biases, stereotypes, and prejudices; and understanding the need to look at issues from more than one perspective.

Advocates for either of the two multicultural education approaches just described agree that to implement a multicultural curriculum, teachers must employ critical pedagogy. Nieto (2012) describes critical pedagogy as a liberating experience that "encourages students to take risks, to be curious, and to question. Rather than expecting students to repeat teachers' words, it expects them to seek their own answers" (p. 56). Critical pedagogy is also illustrated by Sleeter's (1996) description of *Why? Papers*: In this activity students are assigned the task of asking a question about some issue involving race, social class, or gender. In doing research and writing their responses to the questions, students are asked to take the perspective of the group identified in the question. Examples of "Why?" questions include:

- Why are Mexican American children frequently absent from school?
- Why do Native American students drop out of school?
- Why are many African American males in prison? (p. 120)

"Teachers not only teach, but they also learn."

—NATIVE AMERICAN (SAUK) PROVERB

Sleeter reports that taking the minority perspective has been effective because students talk with members of oppressed groups as they search for answers; this provides them with unique insights on a group's past experiences along with their perspectives on the problems being addressed. As they write their papers, students are influenced by these multiple insights and perspectives, both in their analysis and in their conclusions.

Dover (2013) argues that the *critical pedagogy* approach rejects the assumption that the educational process is or should be politically neutral; instead, it assists students in an analysis of curriculum content, the objectives of pedagogical strategies, and the basic goals of the education process. Using activities emphasizing problem posing and dialogue, this approach encourages student development of a sociopolitical consciousness. Sleeter (2011) cited a study of a class of Black and White elementary school students whose teachers infused content into their lessons concerning Black historical figures, historical examples of racism, and successful challenges to racism. All students, but especially White students, gained a greater understanding of racism, and the experience seemed to have a positive effect on their racial attitudes. Although it appears that critical pedagogy has primarily been used in social science and humanities classes, Dover (2013) has observed an increasing use of a critical pedagogy approach in math classes where students are given such tasks as analyzing "racial and socioeconomic trends in traffic stops, food distribution, and urban revitalization/gentrification" (p. 5).

In addition to promoting critical pedagogy, multicultural educators have also worked to eliminate tracking practices because they have tended to diminish diversity in classrooms and adversely affect student academic achievement. Multicultural educators encourage the use of learning centers or cooperative groups as effective strategies for heterogeneous classrooms. Tiedt and Tiedt (2009) describe a learning center as a part of the classroom set aside for the study of a specific topic or for the purpose of developing a particular set of skills; it may be devoted to studying the issue of prejudice or filled with exercises requiring critical thinking. Before using a learning center, students are given directions concerning the center's activities and instructions for using equipment or materials. Students involved in learning center activities can proceed as individuals learning at their own pace or they can be organized into teams.

"One who learns but does not think is lost. One who thinks but does not learn is in great danger."

—CONFUCIUS (551–479 BCE)

Multicultural educators advocate for increased content on diversity and issues of oppression in the curriculum, but critics of this approach argue that it will detract from students' academic learning. The evidence appears to favor the multicultural advocates. Sleeter (2011) reviewed three studies involving middle school students that reported increased levels of student engagement when curricula included authors from the students' ethnic group, and a study evaluating five literacy curricula integrating ethnic content into the lessons that found students increased their academic achievements and their literacy skills. Another study that infused diversity content into math and science lessons reported that students tended to make significant gains in academic achievement.

Some multicultural educators are considering digital learning to explore social justice issues. For example, an ABC *20/20* program upset Lakota youth on the Rosebud Reservation because it depicted youth on their reservations as alcoholic, living in dysfunctional families, and mired in poverty. With teacher assistance, Lakota students in two high school English classes produced a video debunking such stereotypes that was viewed by 70,000 people on YouTube. In 2013, a more dramatic example occurred when undocumented high school students organized a sit-in at the headquarters of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Los Angeles to protest deportation of undocumented youth and Congress's refusal to pass the Dream Act. The students announced their protest on Twitter and Facebook, and when the sit-in occurred, 300 people who had pledged to come and support them surrounded the protesting students. When the Los Angeles police arrived, 4000 Americans watched on streaming video as police officers arrested students. Then protest organizers texted, blogged, and sent out further information on Twitter and Facebook, including a link to a national support network that ended up receiving numerous donations and signed petitions in support of the undocumented students (Van Galen, 2013). To critics of such activities, multicultural educators respond that if schools are engaged in education relevant to students' lives, this kind of activity is a logical outcome as students use what they have learned in school to participate peacefully in the democratic process.

Finally, cooperative learning strategies are especially attractive to advocates of multicultural education because they involve students of mixed abilities in learning tasks that have clearly defined responsibilities for each group member. Each individual must complete his or her task in order for the group

to complete the project. In reviewing research on cooperative learning, Kagan (2006) cites studies documenting that young children in schools with diverse student populations initially interact with others and choose their friends without regard to race, but by the end of their second grade year, self-segregation by race has begun and is dramatically apparent by the end of elementary school. Yet research studies have also found that in classrooms that have implemented cooperative learning strategies, self-segregation was virtually eliminated. Further, Paluck and Green (2009) reviewed meta-analyses of the outcomes of cooperative learning for classrooms of students with racial, ethnic, and disability differences; they found that students had consistently experienced a positive outcome in terms of peer relationships. Based on his review of four decades of research, Kagan (2006) concluded: “Cooperative learning, when it includes heterogeneous teams and team-building, is the single most powerful tool this nation has for improving race relations” (p. 53).

How can multicultural education help to reduce student prejudice?

Reducing prejudice and developing conflict resolution skills are important objectives in multicultural education. Sheets (2005) described a study of a school with diverse students in which African American children expressed negative attitudes toward children who were Asian American or Hispanic American. Koyama (2014) reports that most of the participants in over 400 student leaders workshops said they heard degrading language, slurs, and offensive jokes at school multiple times a day. Further, the comments were not just based on race but also on gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Another societal prejudice that appears in schools is the stigma associated with mental illness. Elias (2013) cited a study finding that almost two thirds of high school students diagnosed with a mental illness felt they had been stigmatized by their peers; another study of middle school students found that only half of the students were willing to sit next to a classmate known to have a mental illness. Such rejection does not have to be inevitable. Some teachers have had students complete and discuss surveys that asked questions about mental health issues such as depression to illustrate that many mental health conditions are commonly experienced. A study by the Adolescent Communication Institute concluded that giving teenagers better information about mental illness, especially that appropriate treatment has helped people successfully with mental disorders, has proven to be effective: “You have to give kids facts that counter their stereotypes, and then many are open to change” (Elias, 2013, p. 50).

According to Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Corbo (2016), multiple studies have found that being presented with various perspectives when discussing issues in a classroom appears to stimulate critical thinking. Further, a body of research on K–12 schools reports that when students learn cooperatively in a classroom with diverse students, all students benefit. These classrooms produce more creativity, and better critical thinking and problem solving skills. A longitudinal study found that students graduating from K–12 schools with a diverse student population tended to have more positive racial attitudes and were able to function more effectively on college campuses with diverse populations (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Corbo, 2016). In addition, Gay (2010) argues that another way to reduce prejudice is for teachers to work with students in ways that take into account the students' diverse cultures. This approach is called "culturally responsive teaching."

"Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education; they grow there, firm as weeds among stones."

—CHARLOTTE BRONTE (1816–1855

Multicultural Education as a Context for Culturally Responsive Teaching

Multicultural education incorporates the idea that all students—regardless of their gender, social class, ethnic, racial, or cultural differences—should have an equal opportunity to learn in school. However, the public school system in the United States is plagued with inequalities; on virtually every measure, students of color and students from lower economic classes achieve below the level of their White and middle-class counterparts. This disparity is called "the achievement gap." A recent report assessing efforts over the past 50 years to close the achievement gap between Black and White students in K–12 schools found that the gap has barely narrowed. If improvements continue at this slow pace, it will take over a century to close the reading gap and over two centuries to close the math gap (Camera, 2016). The gap also persists for those living in poverty. Although recent data suggest that achievement gaps between low-income students and their high-income peers has narrowed over the past 10 years, it is still twice as large as the gap between Black and White students (Sacks, 2016). Mainstream explanations tend to blame the achievement gap on uninformed assumptions about families and communities (i.e., "they just don't value education"), but when scholars examine the ways schools are structured, there is evidence that

institutional characteristics of schools systematically deny some students equal educ

How does culturally responsive teaching address multicultural education goals?

Like multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching has its roots in teacher preparation programs, but its emphasis has been on teachers exploring their cultural identity and that of their students, and implementing culturally responsive activities in their classrooms to improve student achievement. Culturally responsive teachers want to create classrooms that are inclusive of the cultures of all students. They are also challenged to deepen their awareness of inequities due to race, class, and other social categories in their school and in society, and to help students explore and respond to these inequities (Dover, 2013).

Culturally responsive teaching addresses multicultural education's goal of changing school practices that marginalize students. It is grounded in the perception of schooling as linked to social forces in society. Schooling is a primary site of socialization, so schools play a key role in sorting students into predetermined places within a society that is hierarchical and socially stratified. Schools prepare students to occupy roles that have unequal value in society—vocational training versus college preparation or special education versus honors courses; therefore, schools become a site of social reproduction.

Other aspects of schooling that contribute to the achievement gap include standardized testing, culturally biased curriculum, tracking, unequal funding between urban and suburban schools, low expectations for students of color, and zero tolerance policies that criminalize minority students and channel them from school into the prison system (Amurao, 2013). From the beginning, as it was being developed and promoted, the concept of culturally responsive teaching was meant to interrupt these inequitable aspects of schooling (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). While challenging these structural inequities will take time and society-wide effort, multicultural education advocates argue that individual teachers can make an immediate difference in their classrooms by infusing culturally responsive teaching. (See Figure 13.2.)

Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. Rather than viewing

these students as deficient, culturally responsive pedagogy teaches to their specific strengths. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching has the following characteristics:

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 29).

The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) believes culturally competent teachers will be more likely to improve the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds; therefore, CAEP expects teacher preparation programs to incorporate multicultural concepts and information related to all aspects of the content being taught (Chiu, Sayman, & Carrero, 2017). Gay (2010) has argued that to learn how to be culturally responsive in their classrooms, pre-service teachers need to develop lesson plans based on realistic issues, on situations and conflicts that have actually occurred and that have affected students from diverse communities.

What are some current issues that make culturally responsive teaching difficult?

Despite the common belief that racial segregation is a practice of the past, our schools are still segregated. (Bouie, 2014). Most students of color and lower-income students are concentrated in urban areas, whereas most middle-class and White students attend largely homogeneous suburban schools. Yet the numbers of students of color are steadily increasing; by 2021 they are expected to constitute 52 percent of all K–12 students (King & Butler, 2015). Currently, about 80 percent of America's teachers are White

women (Taie & Goldring, 2017), and 88 percent of teacher education professors are White (DiAngelo, 2012). Almost 18 percent of men and over half of African Americans and other ethnic minorities become licensed teachers through alternative certification programs (King & Butler, 2015). In addition to being White, the vast majority of teachers tend to come from segregated schools and neighborhoods. Studies suggest that unless they have had the experience of creating lessons for a multicultural classroom, these teachers are likely to take a traditional, mono-cultural approach that will continue to result in low academic achievement for students of color (King & Butler, 2015).

Which students benefit from culturally responsive teaching?

Research on ethnic studies classes supports the assumption that students of color benefit from being taught information about their group. Sleeter (2011) reviewed research employing different methodologies in different regions of the nation with participants ranging from middle school through higher education and found that students consistently reported a relationship between having a positive attitude toward their own racial group and their individual academic achievement. But students of color are not the only beneficiaries. In her review of ethnic studies research, Sleeter (2011) found that White students felt they benefited from exposure to curricula emphasizing diversity and examining racism, and studies in higher education reported that courses on diversity issues had even more impact on White students than on students of color. Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the inclusion of multiple perspectives, and numerous studies have found that when students are given diverse perspectives, it has stimulated them to think critically about their own perspective and to become more tolerant for different perspectives that attempt to make sense of the issues (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Corbo, 2016).

Multicultural Education as a Context for Culturally Responsive Teaching

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How does culturally responsive teaching address multicultural education goals?

Like multicultural education, culturally responsive teaching has its roots in teacher preparation programs, but its emphasis has been on teachers exploring their cultural identity and that of their students, and implementing culturally responsive activities in their classrooms to improve student achievement. Culturally responsive teachers want to create classrooms that are inclusive of the cultures of all students. They are also challenged to deepen their awareness of inequities due to race, class, and other social categories in their school and in society, and to help students explore and respond to these inequities (Dover, 2013).

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What characteristics are necessary to be a culturally responsive teacher?

Culturally responsive pedagogy requires teachers to respond to the cultures represented in their classrooms. Teachers have to consciously connect new information with the knowledge students bring into the classroom and teach in ways that are consistent with the ways their students learn.

As advocates of culturally responsive pedagogy have argued, this approach validates the experiences of all students. By connecting new information with their existing knowledge, students not only feel capable of learning but also are more likely to demonstrate their capabilities. Richly and Graves (2012) have identified four characteristics that are required for teachers to implement culturally responsive teaching successfully in their classrooms:

- *Caring and empathetic:* This does not simply advocate being “nice”; it means having a strong belief that students can learn and being committed to their success in learning.

- *Reflective about their attitudes and beliefs concerning other cultures:* Since many teachers have grown up in our society and have been exposed to the racist beliefs and attitudes that are so prevalent, it is highly likely that they have internalized at least some stereotypes and false assumptions about diverse cultural groups. Teachers must be reflective, honestly examining their preconceptions about groups represented in their classrooms, and sensitive to language that presents a negative image of a group such as “culturally deprived.”

- *Reflective about their own cultural frames of reference:* Teachers need to become conscious of how they view the world and how that view shapes their choices in the classroom. Their worldview will be reflected in images and symbols, awards and celebrations, and other cultural representations on their bulletin boards and in their curricula. If the diverse cultures of their students are not reflected in these cultural artifacts, these students can feel marginalized, which would likely become a factor contributing to their lack of success in school.

Knowledgeable about other cultures: In order to connect new information to students' background knowledge, teachers must be knowledgeable about the cultural perspectives and practices of groups that are represented in the classroom. Such knowledge will be reflected in the teacher's choice of classroom strategies such as cooperative activities or individual problem solving, gender roles, and adult behavioral expectations regarding children. For example, conventional teaching encourages students to view learning as a personal achievement, but other cultures emphasize doing what is best for the entire community, not just what is good for one member of that community. Understanding this should lead to more effective pedagogical strategies for those students. Teachers must also strike a balance between recognizing distinct cultural practices of a particular group and yet not stereotyping students according to such practices. They must always regard each student is an individual who is affected by other influences.

he characteristics involve ongoing education and self-awareness, particularly for those who have not grown up in environments that offered consistent opportunities to build relationships with people different from themselves in key social areas, such as race and class. Although a school-wide commitment is required for any education reform to achieve authentic transformation in schools, individual teachers may still choose to infuse culturally responsive teaching into their classroom practice.

What actual classroom experiences illustrate culturally responsive teaching?

Learning activities and teacher resources are available to support educators who want to implement culturally responsive teaching (Chiu, Sayman, & Carrero, 2017), but some of the best resources are the lessons developed and implemented by experienced teachers. In the 1990s, Latino performance poetry exploring such issues as inequality, poverty, and racism became popular in southern California and was integrated into English classes in many urban high schools. Several studies found that by engaging in performance poetry, urban students strengthened their skills not only in language but also in critical thinking, and some studies reported that students were using their skills to become activists in their communities. Based on their review of this research, Ramirez and Jimenez-Silva (2015) incorporated performance poetry into their lessons, describing how their Latino students developed stronger analytical skills from writing and performing this poetry and from the rich discussions students had about inequality and social justice issues. In addition to student poetry, poets in

their community were invited to read their poetry and participate in classroom discussions. These students strengthened their interpretive skills, and they engaged in questioning, reflection, and higher-order thinking as they identified and analyzed barriers impacting Latinos and other marginalized groups in their community.

A Filipino American educator developed and implemented a curriculum on the history and culture of the Philippines and the experiences of Filipino Americans that included a problem-posing pedagogy and multiple perspectives to encourage critical thinking. Ten years later a survey was taken of the original group of 35 students (30 Filipino Americans and 5 Euro-Americans) who had engaged with this curriculum. All of the students had completed college, and in response to a question about the lasting value of this class, all of them tended to describe “a deeper love and appreciation of ethnic history, culture, identity, and community” (Sleeter, 2011, p. 14).

It is commonly assumed that culturally responsive teaching is relevant to only some subjects, such as social studies or reading, but not applicable to others such as science and math. A science teacher used a senior level class to teach students about the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study, lasting from 1932 until the 1970s. Medical staff observed African American men who had been diagnosed with syphilis but did not provide them with the normal treatments (e.g., penicillin) that would have helped them, and the men were told that they were not allowed to seek treatment elsewhere. One of the doctors who advised the team conducting the study concluded: “Perhaps here, in conjunction with tuberculosis, will be the end of the Negro problem. Disease will accomplish what man cannot (Kraig-Turner, 2016–2017, p. 31). To understand the moral and medical implications of this study, the teacher provided students with information such as how syphilis progresses and recommended treatments. Each student was given a role to play such as a participant in the study, a widow of a participant, a public health official, or a journalist. After students had time to absorb the role assigned to them, they played that role as they walked around the room talking to one another. They completed writing assignments based on what they learned from being the individual they role-played and other roles. The students were provided with information about other questionable medical practices involving vulnerable p

In sum, no field of study—including math and science—is objective and value free because humans are not objective and value free. Not acknowledging the cultural biases that inform individual perspectives keeps them hidden

and intact, making it more likely that the dominant perspective is presented as neutral and universal, and that dominant interests will continue to be reinforced. By engaging in culturally responsive practices, we actually expand our view rather than limit it. Thus it is imperative to integrate culturally responsive perspectives and practices throughout the entire curriculum.

Dean (2007) has demonstrated how a math teacher can incorporate culturally responsive teaching. She teaches a math lesson by using typical wages in her students' community to build a bridge between algebra and her students' lives. Her students calculate and graph daily and monthly incomes in service sector jobs, using a day's wages and a month's wages for four full-time service industry occupations that many in their community hold—for example, a retail clerk at Walmart, a security guard, a fast-food restaurant cook, and a home nursing aide. Her students graph four linear relationships on the same coordinate grid and write equations for each. Along the way, they discuss questions such as: "What is a minimum wage, and who gets to set it?" She says, "Following an example that I had prepared in advance, students worked together to draw an *x*- and *y*-axis on 11-by-17–inch graph paper. I told them that they would be graphing one day's wages, or eight hours, and that the size of one's paycheck depends on the number of hours worked; therefore, money—the dependent variable—belongs on the *y*-axis. The independent variable, however, will be the same for everyone: You are all going to work an eight-hour day."

After students complete the graphs, she introduces the variables *x* and *y*. In this case, *y* represents the paycheck and *x* stands for the number of hours worked. Ms. Dean also challenges her students to write an equation for each line that would show the relationship between time and earnings, and they arrive at equations to represent the lines on their graphs. She then asks her students to respond in writing to the following prompt: "How does the rate of pay affect the shape and steepness of the lines on your coordinate grid? Describe the shape of a graph for the wage of a job at $20 per hour. Describe the shape of a graph for the wage of a job at the federal minimum of $5.15 per hour." The prompt leads students to observe that the steeper the line, the higher the wage, and that each situation produces a straight line. Both observations pave the way for introducing the term "slope," meaning the rate of increase, and "linear," meaning a relationship that graphs as a straight line. This prompt also serves to identify the coefficient of *x* or the number that multiplies *x* as the value that determines the steepness of the line. Once students recognize linear relationships, Ms. Dean introduces the

concept of *y*-intercept by having students make a table showing pay minus expenses for the first 10 hours of work. This gives students a real-world context for operating with negative numbers. Other dimensions of her “living algebra” lesson include calculating the cost of housing and other ex

As the examples above illustrate, culturally responsive teaching has the potential to be an effective pedagogical approach, but it is also a challenging one. Sleeter (2010) identified four problems that teachers are likely to encounter and how they can be resolved:

1. The tendency to define students in terms of their membership in sociocultural groups and to engage in practices and activities with students associated with these groups. The best way to avoid this problem is for teachers to learn about their students and their communities.
2. The assumption that culturally responsive teaching simply means teaching culturally diverse students about their respective cultures. Culturally responsive teachers regard students as a cultural resource and enlist students’ cultural knowledge to help them apply what they already know to new academic knowledge.
3. The “silver bullet” fallacy—believing there is only one approach that will improve student learning. Teachers must explore alternative approaches, innovative strategies, and new uses of traditional approaches, resulting in a combination of pedagogical strategies. Successful teachers are lifelong learners who keep searching for what works best for their students.

The perception that culturally responsive teaching is only necessary when teaching students of color—an especially harmful perception because it transforms students into “the other.” Culturally responsive teaching should transform teachers by requiring a rigorous self-examination of how they have been influenced by their culture and how they teach and interact with their students.

Sleeter (2010) argues that culturally responsive teaching is a “starting point” for productive dialogues between teachers and students, teachers and parents, and teachers with other teachers. Although culturally responsive teaching requires extra effort and may even seem daunting, it is no more difficult than any other strategy promoting successful classroom practices

that are effective with diverse students. Good teaching is never easy, but in the history of education, there have always been effective teachers, so we know it's not impossible. This should be the response to critics who say that culturally responsive teaching is too idealistic to work in the "real world" of challenges inherent in the everyday task of classroom teaching. Any educational reform will face obstacles, but educators continue to engage in new reform efforts.

What other educational reforms are being implemented?

The most ambitious reform in recent years has been the effort to create a core curriculum to be implemented in every state. Because the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative is the largest attempt in the United States to develop and implement a unified set of standards of knowledge and skills in education, it was inevitable that controversies would emerge. The diverse responses to CCSS as it was being implemented (Fall, 2014) illustrate the complexities involved in a major reform effort, given the current social and political climate. To understand the controversy requires a brief review of the context in which the CCSS was first proposed.

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated that all states develop rigorous standards and that students in grades 3–12 had to complete annual tests to assess proficiency. Ten years after it was implemented, more than half of U.S. schools were listed as "failing" (Editors of *Rethinking Schools*, 2013). The goal of the CCSS initiative was to define what students in kindergarten through twelfth grade should know and be able to do in mathematics and English language arts in order to graduate high school prepared to succeed in "entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014, n.p.). With a common core of educational standards, it was hoped that clearer comparisons could be made across states in their assessments of student learning, and that there would be consistency for students as they moved from school to school or from state to state (O'Connor, 2014)

Critics of CCSS included conservative groups who view the standards as a federal intrusion on states' rights, teacher unions who say dissenting teachers have been punished for opposing implementation (Bidwell, 2014; Rich, 2014), and early childhood educators who cite mismatches between standards and question their appropriateness in early childhood education (Strauss, 2013). Advocates for CCSS insist that the standards promote a rigorous curriculum while emphasizing student-centered activity utilizing

collaboration and reflective learning. One desired outcome of CCSS that is of particular interest to multicultural educators was to improve education for low-income students, giving them the skills to graduate from high school and attend college (Bleiberg & West, 2014). Critics say that CCSS does not address this problem because its emphasis on testing and punitive measures will continue to reproduce inequity in low-income children who face greater obstacles in meeting grade-level proficiencies (Bleiberg & West, 2014; Editors of *Rethinking Schools*, 2013).

Another recent reform effort is based on the concept of Restorative Justice. Restorative justice views a school as a community where everyone is connected in a complex web of relationships. When one individual behaves badly toward another, the web is damaged, affecting everyone. In response to conflicts, restorative justice requires practices that address harm done to an individual and to the community. These practices often represent a preventative rather than a reactionary approach; they offer strategies for teachers to foster positive relationships in a school community, not only among students but also between students, teachers, and staff. In response to conflict, restorative justice practices provide students with the opportunity to engage in discussions of the problem that are intended to identify who was harmed, how the individual was affected, and what actions are most likely to resolve the problem (Kline, 2016). Restorative justice advocates argue that it also addresses broader issues of injustice in schools. For example, the U. S. Department of Justice has reported that three times as many Black students are suspended or expelled from school as White students, and the number of suspensions or expulsions increases when Black children are labeled students with disabilities. Receiving a school suspension is the most significant factor to predict which students will drop out of school (Kline, 2016). Further, as disproportionate numbers of Black students are suspended o